

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
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SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /071 W
-----252138Z 111669 /46

P 251907Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2595

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 1406

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, NU
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT SOMOZA BLAMES CATHOLIC BISHOPS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
PROBLEMS

1. SUMMARY. ON MARCH 24 AMBASSADOR MET WITH PAPAL NUNCIO WHO DESCRIBED SERIOUS DETERIORATION OF CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN THE WAKE OF CATHOLIC BISHOP'S PASTORAL LETTER AND CAPUCHIN MASSACRE CHARGES. NUNCIO REPORTED THAT SOMOZA WAS ANGRY WITH BISHOPS OVER PASTORAL LETTER AND BLAMED THEM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM WITH UNITED STATES. BISHOPS WOULD NOT MAKE ANY CONCILIATORY GESTURES TOWARD SOMOZA OVER HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE AND VICE VERSA. NUNCIO BELIEVES CONFRONTATION BETWEEN CHURCH AND SOMOZA REGIME, WHICH NUNCIO IS TRYING TO AVOID, WOULD BE POLITICALLY DAMAGING TO SOMOZA AND COULD LEAD TO POPULAR MOBILIZATION AGAINST REGIME. AMBASSADOR SUGGESTED THAT BISHOPS CONSIDER ASKING SOMOZA TO ALLOW IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION OF CAPUCHIN MASSACRE ALLEGATIONS. NUNCIO AGREED TO DISCUSS IDEA WITH SOMOZA AND THE BISHOPS NEXT WEEK. END SUMMARY.

2. AMBASSADOR MET WITH PAPAL NUNCIO, GABRIEL MONTALVO, AT NUNCIA-TURE LATE AFTERNOON MARCH 24. THE NUNCIO TOLD AMBASSADOR HE HAD SPENT FOUR HOURS PREVIOUS DAY IN DISCUSSION WITH PRESIDENT SOMOZA CONCERNING CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS. NUNCIO SAID THAT CATHOLIC BISHOPS- RELATIONS WITH PRESIDENT HAD SERIOUSLY DETERIORATED SINCE PUBLICATION OF BISHOPS' PASTORAL LETTER IN JANUARY 1977.

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3. NUNCIO SAID SOMOZA WAS IN HOSTILE MOOD TOWARDS CATHOLIC BISHOPS AND BLAMED THEM FOR CREATING PROBLEMS FOR GON WITH UNITED STATES. SOMOZA ACTED THE INJURED PARTY, ARGUING THAT PUBLICATION OF PASTORAL LETTER IN JANUARY WAS QUOTE INOPPORTUNE UNQUOTE BECAUSE LETTER REFERRED TO HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ALLEGED TO HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN FIRST PART OF 1976, OVER SIX MONTHS AGO. ITS PUBLICATION CONVEYED,

ACCORDING TO SOMOZA, FALSE IMPRESSION THAT CHARGES OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES TO WHICH PASTORAL LETTER REFERRED WERE RECENT EVENTS. ACCORDING TO NUNCIO, SOMOZA WANTED BISHOPS TO PUBLICLY MAKE AMENDS THROUGH SOME APPROPRIATE GESTURE. NUNCIO SAID HE TACTFULLY TOLD SOMOZA THAT THIS WAS IMPOSSIBLE AND THAT THE BISHOPS FELT NO NEED TO APOLOGIZE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS FACING GON.

4. NUNCIO SAID THAT SOMOZA FAVORED DIALOGUE WITH BISHOPS BUT NEITHER SIDE WAS PREPARED TO INITIATE THE MEETING BECAUSE OF POSSIBLY DAMAGING POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS THAT MIGHT BE DRAWN. WHILE SOMOZA INDICATED HE WOULD ADOPT HARD LINE AGAINST THE CHURCH, THE BISHOPS FOR THEIR PART HAD NO INTENTION OF WITHDRAWING OR SOFTENING CHARGES MADE IN PASTORAL LETTER. NUNCIO FEARED THAT SOMOZA WOULD BEGIN TO MAKE LIFE DIFFICULT FOR CHURCH UNLESS STALEMATE WAS BROKEN AND DIALOGUE RESUMED. AT SAME TIME, NUNCIO FELT THAT HARASSMENT OF CATHOLIC CHURCH WOULD LEAVE TO MORE ADVERSE PUBLICITY FOR SOMOZA AND COULD LEAD TO POPULAR MOBILIZATION BEHIND CHURCH, WHICH COULD HAVE FORESEEN POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES.

5. NUNCIO SUSPECTS THAT SOMOZA IS LISTENING TO UNSPECIFIED HARD LINE ADVISERS WHO ARE URGING HIM TO TAKE STRONG MEASURES AGAINST CHURCH, THEREBY ADDING TO TENSIONS RATHER THAN REDUCING THEM. IN HIS VIEW, SOMOZA IS NOT HANDLING HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE WITH NECESSARY POLITICAL PRUDENCE AND INTELLIGENCE. HE FEELS THAT SOMOZA IS GOVERNING ACCORDING TO RULES THAT HAVE BEEN OVERTAKEN BY EVENTS. CATHOLIC CHURCH IS UNWILLING TO BACK DOWN UNDER PRESSURE ON SUCH IMPORTANT ISSUES AS HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. NUNCIO DECLARED THAT SOMOZA IS MISJUDGING LOCAL POLITICAL SITUATION, THAT CHURCH HAS WIDER POPULAR SUPPORT THAN SOMOZA BELIEVES, AND THAT CONFRONTATION

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WOULD BE MORE DAMAGING TO GON THAN TO THE CHURCH. HE ADDED THAT THE PUBLICATION OF U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT ON NICARAGUA IN SOMOZA-OWNED NOVEDADES ON MARCH 23 WAS OMINOUS SIGN. NUNCIO TOOK IT TO MEAN THAT SOMOZA WAS SAYING, IN EFFECT, THAT HE HAD NOTHING TO FEAR OR TO HIDE. IT IMPLIED ADOPTION OF HARD AND INFLEXIBLE LINE.

6. AMBASSADOR SUGGESTED TO NUNCIO THAT AN IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION OF RECENT CAPUCHIN CHARGES OF CAMPESINO MASSACRES AUTHORIZED BY SOMOZA WOULD BE CONSTRUCTIVE, STATESMANLIKE STEP THAT MIGHT REDUCE TENSIONS AND POSSIBLY LEAD TO TRUTH ABOUT ALLEGED MASSACRES. IF THE ALLEGATIONS PROVE TO HAVE SOME BASIS, THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR ABUSES SHOULD BE PUNISHED. NUNCIO SAID THAT THIS IDEA HAD MERIT BUT DOUBTED SOMOZA WOULD ALLOW AN INVESTIGATION, WHICH WOULD BE PERCEIVED AS A SIGN OF POLITICAL WEAKNESS. NEVERTHELESS, NUNCIO SAID HE WOULD SUGGEST POSSIBILITY OF IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION OF CHARGES OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES TO THE BISHOPS AND SOMOZA NEXT WEEK AND CONTINUE HIS EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES. HE PROMISED TO REPORT BACK TO ME THE RESULTS OF HIS MEETINGS. HE ENDED OUR CONVERSATION BY SAYING THAT HE WAS DEEPLY DISTURBED AT RECENT

TURN OF EVENTS AND FEARED THE WORST.

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2596

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 MANAGUA 1406

7. COMMENT. RELATIONS BETWEEN CHURCH AND SOMOZA REGIME SHOWED SIGNS OF STRAIN LAST YEAR BUT CLEARLY DETERIORATED FURTHER AFTER PUBLICATION OF BISHOPS' PASTORAL LETTER AND CAPUCHIN MASSACRE ALLEGATIONS LAST MONTH, AND ENSUING UNFAVORABLE PUBLICITY IN N.Y. TIMES AND TIME MAGAZINE. PRESIDENT IS HURT AND ANGERED BY ATTACKS ON HIS GOVERNMENT AND HIMSELF, AND IS ATTEMPTING TO SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS TO THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS AND PLACE LATTER ON DEFENSIVE. CONFRONTATION WITH CHURCH WOULD LIKELY LEAD TO INCREASED ANTI-SOMOZA AGITATION AND PUBLICITY ABROAD, BUT ESPECIALLY IN U.S. CHURCH CIRCLES, MEDIA AND CONGRESS. THIS COULD PLACE UNBEARABLE STRAIN ON OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. SOMOZA MAY BELIEVE THAT HE CAN BRING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS TO AN END THROUGH STRICTER ORDERS TO NATIONAL GUARD (GN) COMMANDERS, BY HOLDING OFF ANY INVESTIGATION OF PAST ABUSES AND AVOIDING DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS THAT MIGHT ERODE GN MORALE AND ALLEGIANCE TO HIM. NEVERTHELESS, EVEN IF ALLEGATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ARE ENDED OVER COMING MONTHS, OUR VIEW IS THAT PAST VIOLATIONS SHOULD BE INVESTIGATED SINCE IGNORING THEM MAY BE CONDUCTIVE TO RESUMED VIOLATIONS IN THE FUTURE. END COMMENT.
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